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SUBJECT: VISIT OF SENATORS CARDIN, MIKULSKI, AND WICKER TO
MONTENEGRO

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During a visit to Montenegro on May 27, Senators Cardin, Mikulski, and Wicker thanked the GOM leadership for Montenegro's partnership with the U.S., including support for USG efforts in Afghanistan and in the Balkans. Vujanovic and Rocen asked for continued support for Montenegro's NATO integration, and Rocen reiterated that Montenegro would establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo. The Senators urged the GOM to combat organized crime and trafficking in persons aggressively. END SUMMARY

Meeting with President Filip Vujanovic

¶2. (SBU) On May 27, Senator Benjamin Cardin (D-MD and delegation leader), Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), and Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS) met with President Filip Vujanovic in Cetinje and Foreign Minister Milan Rocen in Podgorica. They also saw Parliament Speaker Ranko Krivokapic in Kotor.

¶3. Senator Cardin opened the meeting by expressing his appreciation for Montenegro's continued partnership with the U.S. and upcoming support for NATO efforts in Afghanistan. He also said he supported NATO expansion and Montenegro's progress toward integration into NATO. The Senator also noted his concerns regarding the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the trafficking of persons in the region, including Montenegro.

¶4. (SBU) President Vujanovic said that he appreciated American support both for military reforms and economic development, particularly in the northern region of Montenegro. The President also mentioned the close cooperation with the State of Maine and his hope that this and other partnerships will continue.

¶5. (SBU) The Senators and the President also discussed the following issues in more detail:

--Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): President Vujanovic, fresh from

visits to Serbia and BiH, commended Vice President Biden's trip to the region. He added that Javier Solana's decision to join VP Biden in Sarajevo was "a good sign". Vujanovic also underscored the importance of the three leaders within the Bosnian governing entities adhering to the Dayton agreement. He also pointed to Republika Srpska PM Dodik's recent statement supporting BiH membership in NATO as a positive sign.

--Kosovo: Vujanovic urged the international community to give priority to Kosovo's economic development and called for patience in the "step by step" process of Kosovo's future. He also said that it is vital for the stability of Montenegro and of the region for the GoM to balance its support for Kosovo with the strong pro-Serbian sentiments in northern Montenegro and with Montenegro's desire to normalize ties with Belgrade. Senator Cardin acknowledged the delicate situation which Montenegro faces, and emphasized the constructive role Montenegro can play in the region.

--Afghanistan: Senator Cardin asked Vujanovic if Montenegro's support in Afghanistan has been problematic for the GoM. Vujanovic replied that Montenegro is happy to support NATO efforts in Afghanistan. Senator Wicker also thanked President Vujanovic for Montenegro's support in Afghanistan.

--U.S. State Partnership Program: Senator Mikulski highlighted the importance of ties between U.S. states (such as Maine and Maryland with Montenegro) and foreign countries. Vujanovic responded that Montenegro is open and willing to develop stronger ties with both Maryland and Maine. Senator Mikulski also mentioned that Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley will be

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visiting the region soon and said she will suggest that he include Montenegro in his schedule.

--Trafficking in Persons: When Senator Mikulski raised the issue of trafficking in persons (TIP), Vujanovic said that Montenegro is a transit country but not a source for TIP. He also mentioned Montenegro's efforts to curb TIP have been helped by its good relations and cooperation with other countries.

--Relations with Belgrade: Senator Wicker asked whether the late 2008 expulsion of Montenegro's Ambassador to Belgrade (responding to the GoM's recognition of Kosovo) had resulted in a serious and long-lasting rift in relations between the two countries. Vujanovic assured the Senator that overall relations with Serbia are positive and that Montenegro's new government, once in place, plans to dispatch a new ambassador to Belgrade quickly.

--Global Economic Crisis: Senator Wicker asked how the international economic crisis is affecting Montenegro. The President mentioned the problems facing the country's largest company, the Kombinat Aluminium Podgorice but said the economy is nevertheless stronger than before independence. He also predicted the 2009 tourist season will be successful.

Meeting with Foreign Minister Milan Rocen

¶6. (SBU) Foreign Minister Rocen thanked the Senators for "continuing the American return to the Balkans" - alluding to recent visits by Vice President Biden and Deputy Secretary Steinberg. Rocen also thanked the U.S. delegation for the continued partnership and assistance the U.S. has delivered to Montenegro, commenting that "without America, there might not be a Montenegro." He also praised U.S. assistance for Montenegro's NATO integration, adding that he is optimistic Montenegro will be invited soon to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP).

¶7. (SBU) Senator Cardin praised Montenegro for its "courage" in recognizing Kosovo and commended Montenegro's stabilizing influence in the region. He then asked when Montenegro expects to establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo. The FM replied that diplomatic relations had been delayed for "technical" reasons only. He recalled that Podgorica had, for several months, been requesting that Pristina send a formal diplomatic note proposing diplomatic relations. To date, no note had been received from the GOK. The FM hinted that the timing of Montenegro's positive reply to Kosovo might be influenced by developments in its relations with Serbia.

¶8. (SBU) Senator Mikulski asked about organized crime and TIP in Montenegro. Rocen replied that TIP undermines democracy in all countries and that Montenegro has received assistance from the international community, including the EC and OSCE, to address TIP in Montenegro. Rocen said the rule of law is a top priority for Montenegro, and he praised the support of the U.S. Embassy in this area. He noted that Montenegro, at the urging of the Embassy, is preparing to form a task force on organized crime and corruption. He also remarked that Montenegro's proposed new Criminal Procedure Code will be an improvement over the previous one. Finally, the Minister mentioned that Montenegro is updating its strategy to address TIP and that this process should be completed soon.

¶9. (U) The Senators did not review this message prior to its transmission.

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